Notes Sky High

Ahmedabad's recently concluded festival was a dream come true for music lovers, says Anurita Rathore

TWO decades ago when a group of eclectic musicians came together on a stage to address through their music a sparse gathering of people, they had no idea that the festival they started would metamorphose into a symbol of high art and perseverance.

This year Saptak celebrated twenty very successful years of its existence. Some of the country's biggest names "booked themselves in" for the 11 days that the festival was in town, titillating the musical senses of the Ahmedabad audience eager to soak in their offerings. The festival had internationally recognised artists like Zakir Hussain, Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma, Pt Jasraj and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt , all performing on one stage.

According to Nandan Mehta, one of Saptak's trustees, "The canvas has broadened unbelievably in the last five years. What began as a five-day festival now stretches to around a fortnight." The big names ensured that from the earlier trickle, this time round the audiences came in waves. "Close to 2,500 people attended the festival every day", maintained Anubhai emphasizing the importance of a festival that struck the balance between exhibiting the talents of acclaimed artists and also encouraging younger, promising ones.

Saptak, meaning octave, was founded in 1980 to "broaden the appreciation of Indian classical music and undertake research into its heritage". Believing in the principle that a music lover remains a student for life, the Saptak School of Music does not reward graduating students with degrees. In the festival, which began on January 1, no one made speeches or introduced trustees and organisers.

"The idea was to share music in its pristine form, where everyone was bound by one common passion" elucidated Neeraj Parikh, a participant and student of Pt Jasraj for over 20 years. "For us those 11 days were more significant than any religious function. It was a celebration of not only music but life and nature", added Parikh.

The festival entry which was strictly through invitation, showcased every conceivable musical instrument, right from the experimental double violin and Mohan Veena to the more traditional tabla, harmonium and sitar.

Ahmedabad flocked to see Zakir Hussain's charisma and electrifying performance

Achyut Ganpati, an amateur vocalist who has attended the festival since its inception said, "Festivals like this are heaven for music lovers. You can never dream of listening to Pt Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Hari Prasad Chaurasia in the same evening and that too free of cost. However, Ganpati also felt that festivals like this should go to smaller centres of the state. He was empathising with his music loving friends in Rajkot, Vadodara and Surat. ■